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ABSTRACT

"Dialogue" is a review of labor-management cooperation in public education, whose goal is to provide teachers, administrators, school boards, and labor relations practitioners with analyses of critical issues, information about current projects, reviews of relevant literature, and a variety of special features. Each issue is generally devoted to a single theme. This first issue provides a rationale for labor-management cooperation in public education, showing how labor-management committees might augment the collective bargaining process in two areas where collective bargaining has traditionally operated alone: labor relations and economic needs. The discussion also focuses on the benefits of cooperation between labor and management to the public image of the school district. Other areas where labor-management committees can be of service include inservice education, the development of innovative programs and practices, determination of school policy, and upgrading of teacher morale. The remainder of the issue provides guidelines for establishing a labor-management committee, along with lists of advantages and barriers to labor-management cooperation and strategies for overcoming the barriers. Three books of interest are briefly reviewed at the end. (TE)

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LABOR-MANAGEMENT COOPERATION

IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

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A RATIONALE FOR LABOR-MANAGEMENT COOPERATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Background for Labor-Management Cooperation

The first widescale attempts at labor-management cooperation in the United States can be traced back to the Second World War when, as part of the war effort, industrial workers and employers combined their skills in the interests of increased productivity and efficiency. While some labor-management cooperation continued in the post-war period, it was not until the 1960s that the atmosphere once again became so critical that labor and management began to develop ways to cooperate on an on-going basis and for their mutual benefit. The crisis this time--the perception that the American economy was in serious and long-term difficulty.

In the private sector, the steady growth that had characterized the post-war years slowed or stopped and even reversed in some industries. High interest rates and inflation hindered industrial expansion and precluded necessary renovation. Many industries succumbed to foreign compe-

tition altogether; others closed down only to relocate overseas. Some industries that maintained production facilities within U.S. borders also began to contract out significant portions of the production process.

The public sector fell victim to the industrial and manufacturing decline. More and more people were demanding services at the same time that government revenues to support such services were being withdrawn. There was not only a dwindling tax base, but a taxpayers' revolt as well, manifested in the passing of California's Proposition 13 and Massachusetts' Proposition 2 1/2.

In both the public and the private sector, unemployment was very high and job security was fast becoming an outmoded notion. To some degree, labor and management were feeling the same pinch. In some quarters the notion began to grow that if labor and management could recognize that they suffered from similar problems they might also recognize the mutual benefit to be obtained from cooperative problem-solving.

Many cooperative approaches have subsequently emerged from the economic morass. One such approach is the formation of a labor-management committee which provides a forum for communication between labor and management so that their relationship does not begin at negotiation time and end once the contract is ratified. In the private sector, labor-management committees are wrestling with problems of low productivity, plant closings and consolidation, the introduction of new technology and the need for retraining the work

force. In the public sector, labor- management committees are developing strategies to enabl workers to provide a high level of quality services in the face of dwindling revenues. In addition to strictly economic goals, labor-management committees have been addressing the mounting problem of a largely dissatisfied work force through the initiation of programs aimed at improving the quality of worklife.

The number of labor-management committees in the United States is not known, but there are indicators. At least 4% of private labor contracts are estimated to contain some reference to the processes of labor-management cooperation (see Employment Relations Report, 1984:10). Within state and local governments there are several hundred joint labor-management committees. Some notable examples are the city of San Francisco, which has a work improvement project structured as a network of departmental labor-management committees, and the State of New York, which started with a state-level Quality of Working Life committee and now has an elaborate structure of other state level committees, local committees, subcommittees, and even centers. In other locations, the public safety services have taken the lead in forming labor-management committees. Organized police and firefighters in Massachusetts and Indiana meet regularly at the state level with representatives from state, county and municipal government to resolve issues of mutual concern.

In the public sector, school systems appear to be about the last institutions to turn toward labor-management committees as a means of resolving issues related to the efficient func-

tioning of the work place and improved quality of working life. Yet, there may be more good reasons for labor-management cooperation within education than in any other enterprise, private or public.

LABOR MANAGEMENT COOPERATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Our public schools face a myriad of complex problems that might be resolved through new, cooperative approaches to problem-solving.

We will show how labor-management committees might augment the collective bargaining process in two areas in which collective bargaining has traditionally operated alone--labor relations and economic needs. In addition to addressing these areas, LMCs might also tackle other shared school problems not usually addressed by collective bargaining. Teachers have a great many non-economic needs that never find their way into the negotiating process and they frequently have good ideas that, if included in the original list of demands, are traded off in the negotiating process in favor of higher salaries and better fringe benefits (see Unions and Public Schools, 1984). Following are a number of areas in which labor and management might work together, perhaps for the first time, through the mechanism of a labormanagement committee. The following section focuses on a number of these areas: labor strife, economic needs of teachers and school districts, negative public perception, inservice training requirements, innovative programs, school policy and low teacher morale.

Labor Relations

Year after year, many of our school districts are characterized by labor strife. At its worst, such strife represents a serious impediment to the provision of an essential service. In Indiana alone, protracted contract disputes resulted in 123 unsigned contracts at the beginning of the 1982-83 school year. Outside intervention in the form of mediation was required 117 times in that period.

At the present time, four out of ten government workers are school teachers, 65% of whom are organized. Even though public school teachers are frequently the only public employees with collective bargaining agreements, they are involved in more strikes and other work disputes nationally than any other group of public employees. Wages, fringe benefits and working conditions are the usual causes of these disputes.

In the private sector, labor-management committees (LMCs) have proven their worth by contributing to better labor relations. They have been credited with improving communications generally, reducing the number of grievances filed and getting those that are filed resolved at lower levels, facilitating speedier negotiations and the more timely signing of contracts, and contributing to a more productive attitude at the bargaining table. Because labor disputes are so common in public school districts and since those disputes have such far-reaching implications, public school systems may be particularly appropriate environments for the establishment of labor-management committees aimed at improving labor relations.

Economic Concerns

Unions and the bargaining process have played an important role in teachers' lives, fighting for and securing wages and benefits that would not have been forthcoming otherwise. Whatever the current salary status of a district's teachers, the collective bargaining process will continue to be a necessary tool to insure the recognition of teachers' economic needs. Now, however, even the outlook for continuing incremental improvements in teacher salaries and benefits is not good. The financial burden upon education at the local level has, in many cases, become unbearable. Local budgetary constraints, created by reductions of federal and state dollars allocated to education, combined with declining enrollments, have made it more and more difficult to meet teachers' economic needs. In some cases, teachers in large numbers are facing lay-offs for the very first time. Creative, cooperatively determined solutions to the financial crisis in the public schools are needed if jobs are not to be lost and if the quality of public education is not to suffer.

Labor-management committees are a proven method for bringing labor and management together to develop plans that will alleviate mutually suffered economic problems. Experience has demonstrated that labor-management cooperation results in higher productivity and improved performance, the development of cost-saving processes, better employee attendance, enhanced use of available skills, better accountability procedures and increased organizational flexibility, all of which contribute to a more economically efficient organization. In public school systems, representa-

tives of teachers, the administration and the school board might form a labor-management committee to address concerns such as early retirement incentive plans, experiments in job sharing, talent pools and itinerant teacher provisions, business and university "adoptions," cost-saving and revenue-raising schemes, and other measures that can ensure the economic well-being of the school district and the people who work in it, while preserving a high level of instruction.

Public Perception

Cooperation between labor and management in the corporate setting has resulted in a more positive public image for the corporation generally and for the workers and their employee associations in particular. A recent Newsweek poll indicated that 62% of the population rated the "quality of public education" second on a list of issues to be considered in the selection of a presidential candidate. At the present time, there are few enterprises quite so subject to public censure (and public control) as the public schools, no other employee held quite as responsible for presumed failure as the public school teacher.

Labor strife which interferes with the delivery of instruction is one source of public dissatisfaction. A perception on the part of the public that its public servants (in this case, teachers, administrators and school board members) are not working together toward the public good but are representing narrow and self-serving interests is another source of public dissatisfaction. Finally, the widespread attitude that

our public schools are failing to educate adequately is at the core of our current crisis in public confidence in the school system.

Inservice Education

In the past, labor-management committees have been successful in the area of in-plant training. The school system version of that training--inservice education--provides an area in which labor and management can cooperate for the benefit of teachers and school districts.

Inservice education is frequently a requirement for continued or renewed state certification for teachers; sometimes it is necessary for upward movement on the pay scale. A recent survey of teacher opinions, conducted by the National Education Association (NEA), found that 52% of teachers in a national sample were dissatisfied with the quality of inservice education provided by their school districts. It is very likely that inservice as it is currently provided is not meeting the real needs of school districts either.

An LMC can conceptualize inservice in a variety of ways--as generic training in specific skills for teachers of all subjects (e.g., classroom management, discipline strategies); as a process for improving teachers' skills in their area of expertise; or as a re-training tool to help experienced teachers move into other areas of instruction, even attain another certification--and so develop training that addresses professional and economic needs of the district.

Innovative Programs

An additional area for labor-management cooperation might be in the development of innovative programs and practices. The current alarm over the quality of public education is likely to spawn a new generation of reforms. The literature on educational innovation records the failures of many projects initiated and abandoned during periods of intense concern over alleged shortcomings of our public schools. Solutions that are hastily designed and imposed from above may turn out to be ill-conceived and poorly implemented. School improvement often is best achieved through a problem identification and resolution process which involves all the concerned staff, implementers as well as planners.

One way to implement joint efforts is the "quality of instruction circles" that are springing up in a number of localities across the country. Teachers and administrators organize themselves for the express purpose of designing school based reforms to improve instruction and student achievement. These groups review "requests for proposals" (RFPs) from the federal government, perform initial screening of externally developed innovative programs, sponsor workshops aimed at developing district or school-based programs, and establish procedures for monitoring new practices. Broad staff involvement at every phase gives that program a far better chance of success. Such labor-management cooperation can provide district personnel with a sense of involvement in and control of school improvement.

School Policy

In addition to school practice, a cooperative labor-management effort might also become involved in policy determination on such issues as teacher evaluation. Currently, state legislatures are setting standards without input from representatives of the professional groups to be governed by those standards. Increasingly, legislatures are becoming involved in issues that previously were decided upon by labor and management. Many of the measures thus far proposed run counter to what the professional associations see as their members' best interest. A statewide LMC in public education might develop its own standards and policies that address public concerns about teacher performance, thus gaining some measure of self-regulation. Evaluation schedules, peer review processes, evaluation/self-help workshops, and acceptable responses to the competency-based evaluation movement, can all be generated through cooperative labor-management efforts without legislative action.

Teacher involvement in the merit pay/incentive ladder controversy also can be facilitated by the establishment of an LMC. The LMC, very simply, provides a forum for the introduction of alternative solutions to mutually perceived problems. Inadequate rewards or recognition for the job teachers do is a universally recognized problem; the appropriate response, however, is strongly debated, teachers tending to line up against merit pay plans, administrators and managers tending to favor such plans. A lack of consensus on the issue threatens teacher morale and leads to damaging public perception.

Another policy area of deep concern is student behavior, or discipline. Only 9% of teachers participating in the NEA survey could report no interference with teaching as a result of student misbehavior. Poor discipline disrupts instruction, erodes teacher morale, and threatens health and safety. In surveys of public attitudes about our schools, student behavior figures prominently as an area of dissatisfaction. It is also a frequent matter of contention between teachers and administrators, each side feeling that the other is reneging on responsibilities to control student behavior. A cooperative labor-management approach to developing and implementing student behavior policies very possibly would prove viable and effective for all concerned.

Teacher Morale

In addition to public perception, inservice education, innovative programs and policy formulation, labor-management cooperation might be especially appropriate in dealing with what is becoming a nationwide problem for school systems--low teacher morale. A recent study comparing the job satisfaction of a variety of workers found that teachers constituted the most dissatisfied group of employees surveyed. A great many sources of their dissatisfaction have been identified and some of them have already been discussed. But a particularly critical one emerged from a 1981 study sponsored by the National Middle School Association, which found that teachers' level of job satisfaction is directly proportional to their "decision condition" (i.e., their level of involvement in decisionmaking). Teachers are, of course, one of

the most highly educated groups of workers in our increasingly well-educated national workforce. They feel the need to be more involved in the decisions that affect their daily work lives. Including teachers' opinions on professional issues works not only for teachers but for the good of the school system, too. A labor-management committee can provide the forum in which such a contribution can be made.

Summary

The current crisis in public education is comprised of a variety of problem areas. Underlying the failure to address these problems adequately is the lack of a tradition of cooperation among the principal actors. One obvious outgrowth of this lack is labor strife: protracted contract disputes, the need for mediation, strikes, sick-outs and a general lack of trust. Intense labor strife, if it does not cripple a school district, surely undermines school effectiveness by converting potentially creative energy into negative energy. Labor strife also adversely affects public perception of the schools and their professional staffs.

The failure of programs and policies aimed at improving instruction and student behavior can be considered another outgrowth of the failure of the professional community to work together toward mutually desired goals. The top-down imposition of practices and procedures and the subsequent high failure rate for innovations reinforce negative attitudes among competing constituencies and increase public frustration.

The failure of school managers and administrators to involve teachers in significant decisionmaking about the things that affect their working lives leads to low morale, high turnover, and absenteeism. Both teachers and the system suffer from a situation in which teachers are underutilized and overstressed.

Many of the problems inherent in labor strife, the quality of instruction and teacher morale can be resolved, and new, cooperative approaches to problem-solving can help. Better solutions to current fiscal constraints can be generated in forums of cooperative decision-making. The public schools, perhaps more than any other organization, may benefit from a less hierarchical planning and decisionmaking structure and less adversarial behavior, thus assuring a more satisfied staff, better educated students, and a higher degree of public trust. Labor-management committees in public education can help achieve those goals.

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A LABOR-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Labor-management committees are composed of representatives of labor and management, usually in equal numbers, who meet at regular intervals to examine, discuss, and solve mutual problems. In public school districts, a typical LMC would include the president (or other representative) of the school board, the superintendent of schools, the district's personnel director or chief negotiator, the president of the teachers' association or union, a representative from the bargaining committee and some other representative of the teachers association (a regional representative or the local vice-president). In addition, LMCs may have a neutral chair or group facilitator acceptable to both parties.

Labor-management committees exist within the larger collective bargaining relationship. In adversarial situations, LMCs tend to be established as counter measures to external pressures on all parties. Where collective bargaining relationships are open and trusting, LMCs are created to increase opportunities for integrative behaviors. (See Talbott and Anderson: 10 - 11.)

Although LMCs are separate and distinct from collective bargaining or negotiating committees, the two forums are related. In some instances, the LMC is proposed during negotiations and implemented according to principles spelled out in the contract. On the other hand, ideas initially introduced at a labor-management committee meeting eventually may be formalized at the bargaining table. Examples of this include LMC-designed

experiments in such areas as job-sharing, early retirement, teacher recognition, and day care; expansion of the LMC concept to the building level; and formalization of new roles and relationships, as in standing, topic-specific committees.

Despite the occasional substantive overlaps, however, most of the work of the LMC is on issues that are not and are not likely to be covered by a formal labor agreement. For example, labor-management committees in public school districts might work on improving public and press relations, rewarding student progress, developing standards of professional competence, and providing services to enhance the quality of life of school district employees.

LMCs, then, are usually distinguished from bargaining by function. Another dimension along which they differ is composition. While labor representation might be the same on the bargaining committee and in the LMC, the management representation is not: generally, neither school board members nor superintendents sit in on bargaining sessions. Thus, LMCs provide one of the only forums in which teacher association leaders and school system leaders meet face-to-face.

Finally, LMCs and bargaining committees have a different "ethos." LMCs are oriented toward problem-solving. This is rarely the case in bargaining, even where labor relations are good. At the bargaining table the two sides are competitive, and through the negotiating process they strive for compromise. In the LMC, the two sides address an issue in the spirit of cooperation and they strive for concensus.

Labor-management committees, then, add a new dimension to the relationship between the parties. By providing a channel of communication that exists both between bargaining sessions and outside of bargaining, labor-management committees offer the parties a chance to work out problems that are of mutual concern.

Advantages to Participation in LMCs

In general, the advantages of establishing an LMC include:

- An improved work environment and a better quality worklife as a result of a reduction in hostility between labor and management.
- A more open and supportive environment for planned change as a result of the early and direct participation of instructional staff representatives in decisionmaking about workplace innovations.
- A reduction in major and minor workplace disputes as a result of more regular communication between labor and management.
- A more productive and more satisfied work force as a result of reduced hostilities, better communications, greater involvement in decisionmaking, and enhanced commitment to the goals of the organization.

- A decrease in absenteeism and lateness as a result of improved morale and commitment.

- Better solutions to workplace problems as a result of more information being brought to the decisionmaking process and greater involvement of the personnel most familiar with the problems and ultimately responsible for implementation.

- A better public image for the school system as a result of the reduced hostility among public servants and their cooperative problem-solving efforts.

- A better self-image for staffers as a result of their having more control over their working lives.

- A better image for the teachers' association as a result of the opportunity provided by the LMC for association leaders to demonstrate their skills to management and the public in a responsible and constructive role; and greater visibility for association leaders who have the opportunity to demonstrate to their own membership their on-going role of service provider.

- Enhanced communication and problem-solving skills for school system managers and association leaders as a result of regular participation in a problem-solving process.

Barriers to Labor-Management Cooperation

It is also important to be aware of the factors that may block the establishment and successful operation of an LMC. There are three general kinds of barriers to take into account.

Identity

- Organization managers define success in ways that may be detrimental to more democratic decisionmaking. In particular, they tend to take pride in their ability to make crisp decisions. Also, their status is reflected in the numerous distinctions between them and their workers which may be eroded by participative decisionmaking.

- Labor leaders represent their members "against" management. The simple act of sitting down with management, outside of the bargaining process, may be construed by employee association members as "selling out."

- The assumption that every decision is a joint decision may lead to identity problems as association members hold their leadership responsible for every management decision and management's constituency hold its representatives responsible for every statement a labor leader makes.

- Personnel changes can wreak havoc on a labor-management committee if new leadership does not share the requisite skills and commitment for being an effective LMC member.

History

- In many organizations, labor-management strife has been so bitter and so long-lasting that representatives on both sides find it difficult to cooperate with the other group.

- It is difficult for both sides to overcome the notion that the way things are and have been is the way they always will be.

Pressures of the Moment

- Labor-management cooperation implies a certain level of decentralization. This comes at a time when centralization is being promoted for its benefits as an economy of scale and in expectation of improved efficiency.

- Cooperative decisionmaking takes time, much more time than management by executive fiat. Time constraints, a sense of always being in a hurry, can damage attempts at shared leadership.

- Since bargaining will continue, the time may come when operations of the labor-management committee are adversely affected by preparation for bargaining or outcomes of the bargaining process. The committees only work effectively when common goals form the basis of their actions.

Overcoming the Barriers to Labor-Management Cooperation

Overcoming barriers to cooperation requires attention to adequate communication, facilitation of the cooperative process, and active development of commitment to labor-management cooperation.

Communication

- Confusion is the result of poor or inadequate communication. Both parties to the LMC should make regular reports to their constituencies and issue joint statements about their accomplishments.

Facilitation

- Most of the problems encountered by an LMC can be overcome through the prudent use of a neutral chair or outside facilitator.

  - o A facilitator can provide necessary information and so speed up the decisionmaking process.

  - o A facilitator can keep the group "on-track" and so save time and reduce friction.

  - o A facilitator can arrange for training to improve communication, problem-solving, and other skills.

Commitment

- Commitment to the idea of cooperation can carry an LMC over many rough spots and through hard times.

- LMCs may wish to formalize their existence and their procedures either through the contract or a memorandum of understanding.

- The district may wish to affirm its commitment by writing the requisite cooperative skills into the job descriptions of school system managers.

General Guidelines for Labor-Management Committees

In conclusion, we offer the following general guidelines for the establishment and operation of labor-management committees.

- o LMCs are voluntary organizations.

- o Labor and management are equally represented; ownership of the LMC is shared.

- o LMCs do not interfere with or in any way obstruct the collective bargaining process.

- o Whatever labor disputes have preceeded the establishment of an LMC, and despite any interpersonal hostility that such disputes may have engendered, participation is entered into in good faith (and with the full support of relevant constituents).

- The LMC discusses problems of mutual concern to labor and management and endorses solutions arrived at by concensus.

- All members of the labor-management committee have equal access to the same body of information; facts are not disputed.

- Cost-savings and revenues generated as a result of LMC efforts are distributed equitably.

- LMCs operate in the spirit of cooperation; they are oriented toward problem-solving. Therefore, no idea is rejected out of hand: all participants, regardless of their relative status, are capable of making significant contributions to the decisionmaking process.

Public education appears to offer an excellent milieu for the establishment of labor-management committees. The kinds of problems facing school systems are precisely those that have proven amenable to cooperative problemsolving in other sectors. In addition, the professional commitments of labor and management are identical in public school systems. Finally, the involvement in decisionmaking of such a highly educated workforce can only benefit the organizations that solicit and support such involvement.

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Books of Interest

Labor-Management Relations in the Public Sector: An Annotated Bibliography by Joseph Cayer and Sherry Dickerson covers all scholarly articles, monographs and books dealing with United States public employee labor relations published since 1962. The volume is arranged by topic and includes two appendices: the first lists journals which regularly publish public relations articles; the second identifies organizations which provide information or services important to public sector labor relations scholars and practitioners. (Garland Publishing, Inc., New York & London, 1984.)

In Work and Job Satisfaction in the Public Sector, Anne H. Hopkins reports on data from a survey of randomly selected state employees working in five state capitols. The author proposes a new model of job satisfaction that incorporates job environment factors and job characteristics, but rejects the recent emphasis on job redesign. Also examined is the impact of unionization on job satisfaction. (Roman & Allanheld, Totowa, New Jersey, 1983.)

In Unions and Public Schools, Randall W. Eberts and Joe A. Stone summarize data collected over a four year period from a broad cross-section of districts. The authors consider the effects of teacher collective bargaining on the mobility of teachers, the allocation of resources, wage differentials, working conditions, teacher attitudes and job satisfaction, teacher-administrator interactions, administrative discretion, educational policy and practice, the determinants of student achievement, and district operating costs. (Lexington Books, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1984.)

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